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FM AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7531
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS PRIORITY
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 4612
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1828
RUEHPB/AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY 3609
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 1371
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 2207
RUEHBAD/AMCONSUL PERTH 0510
RHHJJPI/USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JAKARTA 000004

SIPDIS

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DEPT FOR EAP, EAP/MTS, EAP/MLS, DRL, DRL/IRF, DRL/AWH
INR FOR CHARLIE ZENZIE
NSC FOR EPHU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/02/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [KISL](#) [ID](#)

SUBJECT: RELIGIOUS FREEDOM -- EX-PRESIDENT TAKES STAND
AGAINST EXTREMISM

REF: A. JAKARTA 2878

[1B.](#) JAKARTA 3442

[1C.](#) JAKARTA 3464

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Classified By: Pol/C Joseph Legend Novak, reasons 1.4 (b+d).

[11.](#) (C) SUMMARY: Former president Wahid--who is also known as "Gus Dur"--recently denounced violence against minority religious sects. He also criticized the Indonesia Ulama Council (MUI) for its role in issuing edicts that are used by militants as excuses for religious-based violence. Wahid's public policy institute has also recommended that MUI lose its officially sanctioned status. Wahid is generally respected, but many Indonesians may see his remarks as mere political posturing given his apparent desire to run for president again. END SUMMARY.

TAKING A STAND

[12.](#) (SBU) Former president Abdurrahman Wahid has stepped into the fray involving Indonesia's debate on how mainstream Muslims should treat minority sects. On December 30, Wahid--who was president from 1999-2001--harshly criticized recent attacks on the Ahmadiyah and Al-Qiyadah Muslim sects (Refs A, B). In televised year-end discussions on the state of the country, Wahid focused on what he characterized as MUI's "contribution" to violence. He noted that the officially-sanctioned body regularly issues "fatwas" (religious edicts) attacking such sects as being outside the Muslim faith. Echoing Vice President Kalla's comments from last week (Ref C), Wahid emphasized the Indonesian Constitution's guarantees for freedom of religion and said MUI "has forgotten that Indonesia is not an Islamic state."

INSTITUTE PRESSES CONCERNS

[13.](#) (SBU) Wahid's public policy institute, The Wahid Institute, has taken a similarly aggressive stance against the MUI. The human rights-oriented think tank, which Wahid set up in 2003, has strongly criticized the MUI's alleged instigation of attacks on Muslims it has labeled as heretics.

While taking its strongest stand in defense of Ahmadiyah, the Institute has also recently catalogued MUI's role in actions against other alleged heretics and its opposition to the expansion of a Hindu temple in Lombok. The Institute in November proposed removing official government recognition from the MUI and taking away the MUI's lucrative role in certifying food and medicines as halal (permissible for consumption under Islamic guidelines).

THE PRESIDENTIAL TRACK?

¶4. (C) Wahid's widely reported remarks come as he opened the door for another run at the presidency in 2009. The former president, who was impeached in 2001 on corruption charges, said that he had been asked to run by elders in his National Awakening Party, which draws support mostly from the Nahdlatul Ulama (Indonesia's largest Muslim organization, which Wahid led before becoming president in 1999). When queried about whether Wahid plans to take the plunge, contacts have told us that he does and that his health is up to the challenge. (Note: Wahid, 67, has faced serious health issues for many years.)

AN INFLUENTIAL PERSPECTIVE

¶5. (C) Wahid's lifelong work on Islamic issues and his longstanding record of promoting interfaith dialogue give his remarks against the MUI more weight with the public than his sometimes erratic and self-aggrandizing political pronouncements. Indeed, the fact that he seems to have decided to run for president may discount the impact of his remarks, as Indonesians see him as being engaged in mere political posturing. The former president has previously been criticized by radical groups for his views in defense of adherents of fringe sects. Nevertheless, Wahid's focus on the MUI applies more pressure on that body and the power it wields.

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HUME